

CHRISTIANITY'S BIG QUESTIONS WINTER 2024

RS 253

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CLASS SCHEDULE

Section	Location	Time	Instructor(s)
RS 253 001 [LEC]	CGR 1302	Tuesdays & Thursdays 1 p.m. - 2:20 p.m.	Jeremy Bergen jbergen@uwaterloo.ca
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INSTRUCTOR & TA (TEACHING ASSISTANT) INFORMATION

Office hours: Thursdays 2:30-3:30 p.m., and by appointment.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Calendar Description for RS 253

Who is God? What does it mean to be human? What difference does the death of Jesus Christ make? What is the purpose of the Christian church? What happens after death? This course will explore the diversity of Christian responses to these questions and examine debates about the meaning of such beliefs in contemporary contexts. [Note: This course fulfils an Area 2 requirement for Religious Studies majors.]

Antireq: RS 152

Christianity constitutes an embodied, complex, diverse, and dynamic set of responses to a wide range of life's "big questions." The discipline of Christian theology has emerged to understand, debate, and assess the beliefs and practices that have emerged, and to make proposals for what beliefs and practices ought to be embraced. Therefore, the course will primarily engage in theological thinking.

Territorial Acknowledgement: The University of Waterloo acknowledges that much of our work takes place on the traditional territory of the Neutral, Anishinaabeg and Haudenosaunee peoples. Our main campus is situated on the Haldimand Tract, the land granted to the Six Nations that includes six miles on each side of the Grand River. Our active work toward reconciliation takes place across our campuses through research, learning, teaching, and community building, and is centralized within the [Office of Indigenous Relations](https://uwaterloo.ca/indigenous) (<https://uwaterloo.ca/indigenous>).

In this course, the inclusion of several readings which wrestle with the complicated relationship between Christianity and Indigenous spiritualities and cultures and the visit for one class of an Indigenous Christian theologian are elements in the pursuit of reconciliation.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course students should be able to:

1. understand the history, language, sources, norms and methods of Christian theology
2. understand the basic content of Christian theology and to enter into debate about this content

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| 3. demonstrate what it means to think, speak, and write theologically |
| 4. read theological texts carefully and critically |
| 5. make connections between Christian theology and contemporary social and political issues |
| 6. understand the diversity of practices and beliefs in contemporary Christianity |

TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE

Please complete the required reading in advance of the class for which it is listed and bring a copy (hard or electronic copy) with you to class.

1. January 9 – Introduction to the course
 2. January 11 – History and context
 3. January 16 – What is theology?
 - González and Maldonado, 9-31 [Chapter I – What is Theology, sections 1-7]
 4. January 18 – Revelation /Bible
 - González and Maldonado, 33-49 [Chapter II – Who is God? sections 1-3]
 - Podcast: The Bible for Normal People, episode 27, “Authority, Revelation, Inspiration”
 5. January 23 – God
 - González and Maldonado, 49-54 [Chapter II, section 4]
 6. January 25 - Trinity
 - David S. Cunningham, “The Holy Trinity: The Very Heart of Christian Ministry,” *Quarterly Review*, 22 no. 2 (Summer 2002): 125-137.
 - *Reports on magazine assignment (in class)*
 - *Magazine assignment (due 11:59 p.m.)*
 7. January 30 – Creation
 - González and Maldonado, 55-64 [Chapter III – What is the World, Who are We? Sections 1-2]
 8. February 1 – Theological Anthropology
 - González and Maldonado, 64-76 [Chapter III, sections 3-5]
 - Tim Basselin, “Why Theology Needs Disability,” *Theology Today* 68, no. 1 (April 2011): 47-57.
 9. February 6 – Jesus Christ
 - González and Maldonado, 77-83 [Chapter IV – Who is Jesus Christ? section 1]
 - *Short essay 1 (due 11:59 p.m.)*
 10. February 8 – Intercultural Christology
 - George “Tink” Tinker, “Christology and Colonialism,” in *American Indian Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 84-111.
 11. February 13 – Atonement
 - González and Maldonado, 83-95 [Chapter IV, sections 2-3]
 12. February 15 – The Cross
 - James H. Cone, “Legacies of the Cross and the Lynching Tree,” in *The Cross and the Lynching Tree* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011), 152-166.
- [Reading week]
13. February 27 - Christianity and Indigenous Spirituality
 - Randy S. Woodley, “Decolonizing Western Christian Theology,” in *Indigenous Theology and the Western Worldview* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2022), 89-117.
 - *In-class quiz*

14. February 29 – guest: [Dr. Ray Aldred](https://vst.edu/people/raymond-aldred/) (https://vst.edu/people/raymond-aldred/)

15. March 5 – Church

- González and Maldonado, 97-118 [Chapter V – What is the Church? sections 1-2]
- *Short essay 2 (due 11:59 p.m.)*

16. March 7 – Catholic/Protestant differences; ecumenism

- Robert Barron and Roger Olson, “Grace First or Grace Alone? What Catholics and Protestants Now Agree on, and What Still Divides Us,” *Christianity Today*, April 2017, 43-46.

17. March 12 – Sacraments [Chapter VI – How Does the Church Live? sections 1-2]

- González and Maldonado, 119-137

18. March 14 - The “problem” of evil and the Christian life

- John Swinton, “From Theodicy to Resistance,” in *Raging with Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 69-89.

19. March 19 - Hope

- González and Maldonado, 139-158 [Chapter VII – What is our Hope? sections 1-4]
- Laura Yordy, “Is Heaven Just for Human Souls?” in *A Faith Encompassing All Creation*, ed. Tripp York and Andy Alexis-Baker (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 120-129.

20. March 21 - Universalism

- Podcast: The Bible for Normal People, [Faith – episode 7], “The Historical Roots of Christian Universalism”

21. March 26 – Christianity and other faiths

- J.A. DiNoia, “What About Them? Christians and Non-Christians,” in *Essentials of Christian Theology*, ed. William C. Placher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 318-327.

22. March 28 - Topic and reading(s) to be determined

23. April 2 - Topic and reading(s) to be determined

24. April 4 - Review for the exam

TEXTS / MATERIALS

Title / Name	Notes / Comments	Required
Justo L. González and Zaida Maldonado Pérez, <i>An Introduction to Christian Theology</i> (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002).	E-book or hard copy. UW bookstore provides link to e-book version.	Yes

All other required readings will be provided through LEARN.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Component	Value
1. Engaged attendance and participation	14%
2. Christian magazine report – due January 25	10%
3. Short essay 1 – due February 6	20%
4. In-class quiz – February 27	8%
5. Short essay 2 - due March 5	20%

Component	Value
6. Final exam	28%

1. Engaged attendance and participation (14%)

Key learning in this course will happen during the scheduled class meetings. You are expected to attend all classes, complete all required readings on time, *bring a question or comment on each reading*, take notes during lectures, and engage in informed, critical, balanced (in the sense of not speaking too little or too much) and sensitive ways with others. Come to every class prepared to discuss in small groups and contribute to all-class discussions.

Please see the section below regarding “Declaring Absences.” If there are other compelling reasons why cannot be present on a given day, please let me know. For each class missed beyond two, there will be an automatic deduction of one mark.

2. Christian magazine report (10%) – due January 25 (11:59 p.m.)

Select one of the following magazines:

Grebel library: *Christian Century* (mainline Protestant US), *Christianity Today* (evangelical Protestant US), *Faith Today* (evangelical Protestant Canada), *Sojourners* (social justice US)

SJU library: *National Catholic Reporter* (mainline/progressive Catholic), *The Tablet* (UK and global Catholic), *U.S. Catholic*

Then select one recent issue (but it does not need to be the most recent—previous issues will be under/behind the display shelf). Spend at least 45 minutes with it, flipping through it, scanning the headlines, and reading articles that catch your attention.

Write a 2.5-3 page report in which you reflect on these questions. What are the key issues that the magazine identifies? (Don't report on everything, but select some highlights or characterize some themes.) How are those issues addressed? Does the author and/or publication take a “position”? Based on the coverage in that one issue, what would you say are some of Christianity's “big questions”? You do not need to include full bibliographic information for every article you reference in your report, but you should make clear which magazine and which issue you are engaging with, (e.g. *Christian Century*, December 2023)

You will share a brief report *in class* (Jan 25) on what you have found (2-3 minutes), but your mark will be based on the written version you have submitted.

3. Short essay 1 (20%) – due February 6 (11:59 p.m.)

Write a 6-7 page essay in which you summarize and critically respond to “Is God in Charge? Creation and Providence,” by Sallie McFague. Further details on this assignment are posted in the “Assignments” section of LEARN.

4. In-class quiz (8%) – February 27

This *low stakes* quiz will test whether you have been keeping up with the readings and class lectures. It will consist of T/F, multiple choice, and some short answer questions, and will be held during the final 25 minutes or so of class.

5. Short essay 2 (20%) – due March 5 (11:59 p.m.)

Write a 6-7 page essay in which you summarize and critically respond to “God Does Not Demand Blood: Beyond Redemptive Violence,” by Daniel Bell, Jr. Further details on this assignment are posted in the “Assignments” section of LEARN.

6. Final exam (28%)

The exam will be scheduled by the university and is subject to all university regulations for exams, including changes for conflicts. See the [Registrar's exam website](https://uwaterloo.ca/registrar/final-examinations) (https://uwaterloo.ca/registrar/final-examinations) for more information. The exam will cover material (readings, lectures, discussion) from the entire course. There will be a mix of T/F, multiple choice, short answer, and short essay questions.

Bonus:

It is possible to receive *one* bonus of 3%. Attend an in-person public lecture that addresses one of “Christianity's Big Questions.” Write a 1.5-2 page report that briefly summarizes the speaker's main thesis and reflects critically on an issue or issues they raised. This must be completed by April 17 (absolute deadline). A list of approved public lectures can be found in the “Assignments” section and will be updated throughout the term. If you want to attend something not on this list, consult with the instructor first.

ASSIGNMENT SCREENING

No assignment screening will be used in this course.

ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY

GENERATIVE AI

This course includes the independent development and practice of specific skills, such as critical writing in response to theological texts. Therefore, the use of Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) trained using large language models (LLM) or other methods to produce text, images, music, or code, like Chat GPT, DALL-E, or GitHub CoPilot, is not permitted in this class. Unauthorized use in this course, such as running course materials through GenAI or using GenAI to complete a course assessment is considered a violation of [Policy 71](https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-71) (<https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-71>) (plagiarism or unauthorized aids or assistance). Work produced with the assistance of AI tools does not represent the author's original work and is therefore in violation of the fundamental values of academic integrity including honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility and courage ([ICAI](https://academicintegrity.org/images/pdfs/20019_ICAI-Fundamental-Values_R12.pdf) (https://academicintegrity.org/images/pdfs/20019_ICAI-Fundamental-Values_R12.pdf), n.d.).

You should be prepared to show your work. To demonstrate your learning, you should keep your rough notes, including research notes, brainstorming, and drafting notes. You may be asked to submit these notes along with earlier drafts of their work, either through saved drafts or saved versions of a document. If the use of GenAI is suspected where not permitted, you may be asked to meet with your instructor or TA to provide explanations to support the submitted material as being your original work. Through this process, if you have not sufficiently supported your work, academic misconduct allegations may be brought to the Associate Dean.

In addition, you should be aware that the legal/copyright status of generative AI inputs and outputs is unclear. More information is available from the Copyright Advisory Committee: <https://uwaterloo.ca/copyright-at-waterloo/teaching/generative-artificial-intelligence> (<https://uwaterloo.ca/copyright-at-waterloo/teaching/generative-artificial-intelligence>)

Students are encouraged to reach out to campus supports if they need help with their coursework including:

- [Student Success Office](https://uwaterloo.ca/student-success/resources) (<https://uwaterloo.ca/student-success/resources>) for help with skills like notetaking and time management
- [Writing and Communication Centre](https://uwaterloo.ca/writing-and-communication-centre/services-o/services-undergraduate-students) (<https://uwaterloo.ca/writing-and-communication-centre/services-o/services-undergraduate-students>) for assignments with writing or presentations
- [AccessAbility Services](https://uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/students) (<https://uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/students>) for documented accommodations
- [Library](https://uwaterloo.ca/library/research-supports/quick-start-guide) (<https://uwaterloo.ca/library/research-supports/quick-start-guide>) for research-based assignments

ANTI-RACISM STATEMENT

The University of Waterloo does not tolerate racism or any other form of discrimination and expects campus community members to contribute to a culture where all members feel safe and valued. Any member of the campus community who has experienced racism or discrimination at the University is encouraged to review available processes for addressing their concerns under Policy 33 – Ethical Behaviour and to seek guidance from the Equity Office via email at equity@uwaterloo.ca (<https://uwaterloo.ca/presidents-anti-racism-taskforce/part-report/equity@uwaterloo.ca>) or through their [website](https://uwaterloo.ca/equity-diversity-inclusion-anti-racism/) (<https://uwaterloo.ca/equity-diversity-inclusion-anti-racism/>)

DECLARING ABSENCES

For all of the following categories of absence students are responsible for getting in touch with their course instructors as soon as possible to discuss possible accommodations for the missed course component(s). The course instructor will determine how the missed work is accommodated. Absences will be accommodated according to the [academic regulations section of the undergraduate calendar](https://ugradcalendar.uwaterloo.ca/page/Acad-Regs-Accommodations) (<https://ugradcalendar.uwaterloo.ca/page/Acad-Regs-Accommodations>).

If you are unable to complete a course component due to [self-declared COVID-related reasons](https://uwaterloo.ca/quest/help/students/how-do-i/self-declare-absence-undergraduate-students#public-health) (<https://uwaterloo.ca/quest/help/students/how-do-i/self-declare-absence-undergraduate-students#public-health>) or a [two-day short-term absence](https://uwaterloo.ca/registrar/current-students/undergraduate-student-short-term-absences) (<https://uwaterloo.ca/registrar/current-students/undergraduate-student-short-term-absences>) then you should submit a self-declaration of absence through [Quest](https://uwaterloo.ca/quest/help/students/how-do-i/self-declare-absence-undergraduate-students) (<https://uwaterloo.ca/quest/help/students/how-do-i/self-declare-absence-undergraduate-students>).

If your absence is due to an [illness not pandemic-related](https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/undergraduate/student-support/accommodations-illness-or-extenuating-circumstances#VIF) (<https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/undergraduate/student-support/accommodations-illness-or-extenuating-circumstances#VIF>), then a [UW Verification of Illness form](https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/undergraduate/student-support/accommodations-illness-or-extenuating-circumstances#VIF), (<https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/undergraduate/student-support/accommodations-illness-or-extenuating-circumstances#VIF>) completed by a health professional, must be uploaded and submitted through the [Verification of Illness or Extenuating Circumstances Process](https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/undergraduate/student-support/accommodations-illness-or-extenuating-circumstances#submit-other). (<https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/undergraduate/student-support/accommodations-illness-or-extenuating-circumstances#submit-other>) The VIF is the only acceptable documentation for an absence due to illness. Do not submit the VIF or any other medical documentation to your instructors, teaching assistants, or other course personnel.

If your absence is due to other [extenuating circumstances](https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/undergraduate/student-support/accommodations-illness-or-extenuating-circumstances#submit-other) (https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/undergraduate/student-support/accommodations-illness-or-extenuating-circumstances#submit-other) (e.g., bereavement), then you must submit all documentation related to the absence (e.g., obituary) through the [Verification of Illness or Extenuating Circumstances Process](https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/undergraduate/student-support/accommodations-illness-or-extenuating-circumstances#submit-other) (https://uwaterloo.ca/arts/undergraduate/student-support/accommodations-illness-or-extenuating-circumstances#submit-other) .

Submission through the VIF or Extenuating Circumstances System, once approved, will notify your instructors of your absence.

If your absence is due to a [religious or spiritual observance](https://ugradcalendar.uwaterloo.ca/page/Acad-Regs-Accommodations) (https://ugradcalendar.uwaterloo.ca/page/Acad-Regs-Accommodations) please inform the instructor within two weeks of the announcement of the due date for which the accommodation is being sought. However, you are responsible for contacting instructors to discuss accommodation arrangements.

UNIVERSITY POLICY

Academic integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. [Check [the Office of Academic Integrity](https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/) (https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/) for more information.]

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4](https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70) (https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70) . When in doubt, please be certain to contact the department's administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for their actions. [Check [the Office of Academic Integrity](https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/) (https://uwaterloo.ca/academic-integrity/) for more information.] A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course instructor, academic advisor, or the undergraduate associate dean. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to [Policy 71, Student Discipline](https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-71) (https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-71) . For typical penalties, check [Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties](https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/guidelines/guidelines-assessment-penalties) (https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/guidelines/guidelines-assessment-penalties) .

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under [Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances](https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70) (https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-70) (other than a petition) or [Policy 71, Student Discipline](https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-71) (https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-71) may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes they have a ground for an appeal should refer to [Policy 72, Student Appeals](https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-72) (https://uwaterloo.ca/secretariat/policies-procedures-guidelines/policy-72) .

Note for students with disabilities: [AccessAbility Services](https://uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/) (https://uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/) , located in Needles Hall, Room 1401, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term.

Turnitin.com: Text matching software (Turnitin®) may be used to screen assignments in this course. Turnitin® is used to verify that all materials and sources in assignments are documented. Students' submissions are stored on a U.S. server, therefore students must be given an alternative (e.g., scaffolded assignment or annotated bibliography), if they are concerned about their privacy and/or security. Students will be given due notice, in the first week of the term and/or at the time assignment details are provided, about arrangements and alternatives for the use of Turnitin in this course.

It is the responsibility of the student to notify the instructor if they, in the first week of term or at the time assignment details are provided, wish to submit alternate assignment.